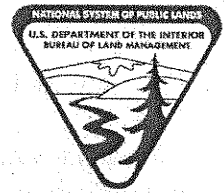




United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
UNCOMPAHGRE FIELD OFFICE
2465 South Townsend
Montrose, CO 81401
www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/ufo.html



In Reply refer to:
1792 (COS05)

CERTIFIED MAIL RETURN RECEIPT REQUESTED

JUL 17 2014

Dear Interested Party:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Uncompahgre Field Office is beginning work on an Environmental Assessment (EA) which will analyze renewing grazing permits on allotments in and around the Gunnison Gorge National Conservation Area (GGNCA) (attached map). You are receiving this letter because you may have an interest in one or more of these allotments.

The BLM collected land health field data in the 2011 growing season and completed a Land Health Assessment (LHA) for the area in July, 2012. The LHA results are used while developing the proposed grazing authorization, including Terms and Conditions of the permit, which could modify grazing practices where necessary.

The BLM will hold a public meeting regarding the LHA and the grazing permit renewal process. LHA results will be presented along with the land health criteria BLM uses to generate conclusions from data collected. The BLM will also discuss the EA for renewing grazing permits, which will include a discussion of the proposed action and the potential of generating alternative actions.

The public meeting will be held on Wednesday, July 30, 2014, from 1-3 p.m. at Bill Heddles Recreation Center in Delta Colorado. Affected livestock grazing permittees as well as interested and affected parties are encouraged to attend.

The public meeting will be followed by a two-week comment period which will serve as public scoping. Your comments will assist in developing alternatives and with identifying issues that should be addressed as part of the analysis that will be prepared. You do not need to attend the meeting to provide comments. If you are interested in participating in the environmental analysis process, or have specific concerns, issues, or alternatives you would like addressed, please mail written comments to:

Bureau of Land Management
Attn: GGNCA Grazing Permits
2465 South Townsend Ave.
Montrose, Colorado 81401
Fax: 970-240-5368

or
E-mail: UncNEPA@blm.gov

Comments must be submitted in writing by mail, email, or fax. Comments concerning this proposal should be submitted no later than August 13, 2014.

Comments must concern livestock grazing permits in the GGNCA LHA area (attached map) and/or conclusions presented in the LHA, and include supporting reasons for the Authorized Officer to consider. Also, for appeal eligibility, each individual or representative from each organization submitting comments must either sign the comments or verify their identity upon request.

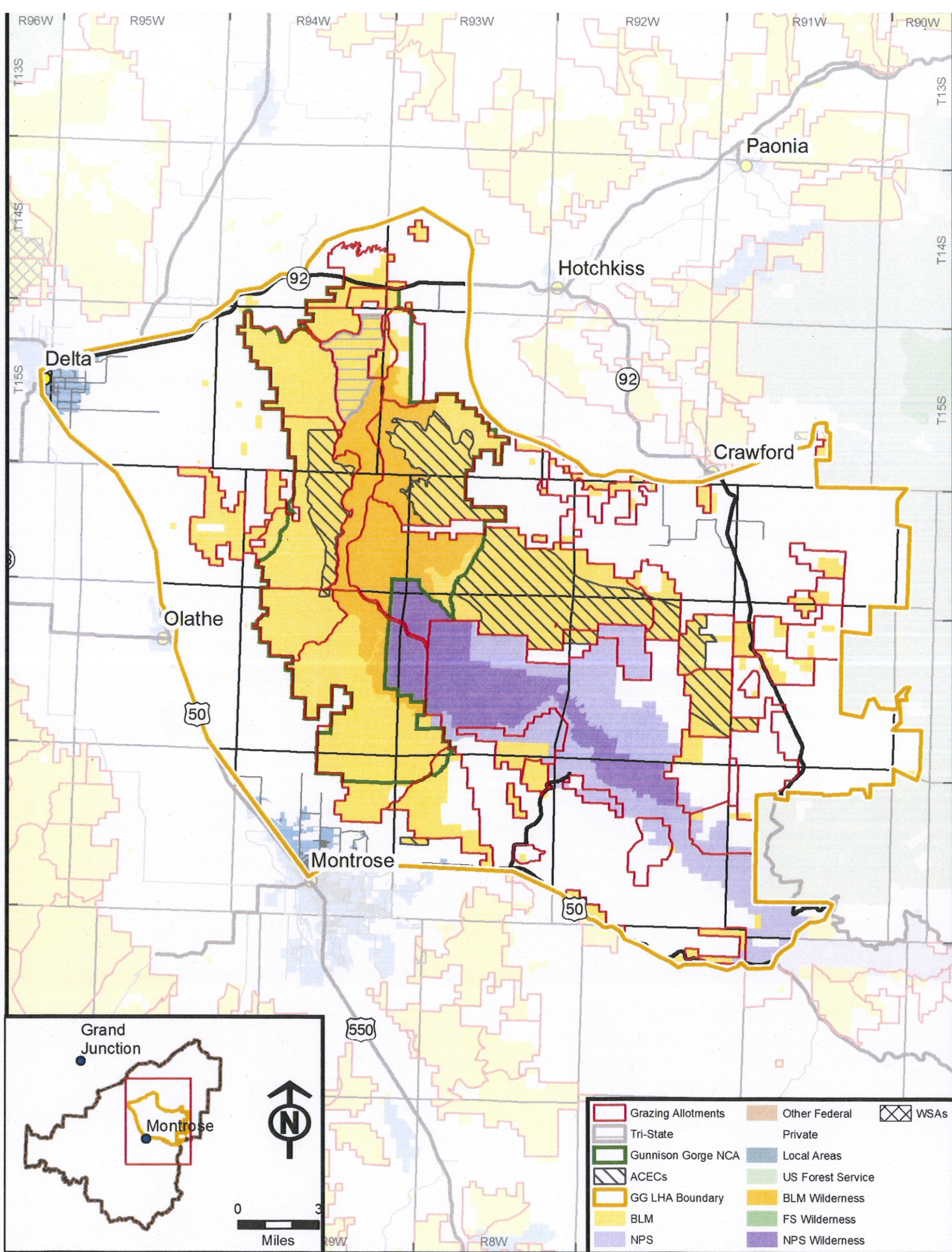
Please note that comments and information submitted regarding this project, including email addresses and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review and disclosure at the above address. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name, email address, or street address from public view or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by the law. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives of officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

Sincerely,



Barbara Sharrow
Field Manager
Uncompahgre Field Office

Attachment: Map of the LHA and Permit Renewal Area
Attachment: Summary of Proposed Action



Summary of the Draft Proposed Action

Environmental Assessment for Gunnison Gorge Permit Renewal

The proposed action is to issue livestock grazing permits with terms and conditions within the Gunnison Gorge Planning area. New grazing permits and terms and conditions may be modified from the previous permit so progress can be made towards meeting the fundamentals of rangeland health. Modifications may include reductions in AUMs, adjustments in season of use, more intensive livestock management, amount of utilization, or changes to class of livestock. Modification may also include changes to timing, intensity, or duration of grazing, or allow the use of other grazing seasons not stated on the permit. The permits would have provisions for drought, which include advance planning and communication, field-level data collection and use of a variety of standard range management practices. The practices (Drought Response Tools) would be applied when and where necessary in grazing allotments.

Allotments in this permit renewal EA include:

Adobe South (#05030);	Dead Horse Common	Pine Ridge #05040);
Adobe (#05027);	(#05010);	Pinyon Springs (#05033);
Allen Reservoir (#05050);	Dedication Site (#05002);	Poison Springs (#05014);
Big Gulch (#03630);	Doug Creek (#05028);	Rabbit Gulch (#05022);
Big Gulch 40 (#05036);	E. Gould Reservoir (#05041);	Rawhide /Coffepot (#05034);
Big Pasture (#05044);	Fruitland Mesa (#03920);	Red Canyon (#05038);
Black Bullet (#05045);	Gould Reservoir (#05011);	Rim Rock (#05051);
Black Cyn/Jones Draw	Green Mnt (#05017);	Selig Canal (#05003);
(#05031);	Grizzly Gulch (#05015);	Shamrock (#05024);
Black Ridge (#05020);	Iron Canyon (#05013);	Smith Fork Ind (#05049);
Bostwick Park (#05032);	Middle Peach Valley	Smith Mnt (#05001);
Brush Point (#05008);	(#03276);	Spring Gulch (#05029);
Cedar Point (#05012);	Needle Rock (#14542);	Sulphur Gulch (#05023);
Collins (#05043);	North Saddle Peak (#14540);	Tri-State Grassbank (no #);
Crawford Res. (#05018);	Onion Valley (#05039);	Upper Peach Valley (#05007)

Allotments where acres are “not meeting” for Land Health Standard 3 (plants, animals) due to Open OHV area impacts, AUMs may be adjusted in relation to highly impacted acres within the Open OHV areas.

The following **design features** are part of the proposed action.

Standard Design Features

- After collaboration with the permittee, modifications to the permit may be made in response to abnormal environmental events such as drought, heavy snow fall, and flooding etc. Modification may include timing, intensity, or duration of grazing, or the use of other grazing seasons not stated on the permit.
- During times of drought, the following design features will be implemented. Trigger points and drought monitoring process are described in the Drought Detection and Monitoring Plan.

<i>Trigger Point*</i>	<i>Drought Management Objectives</i>
Moderate Drought	Assess conditions January 15 prior to spring turnout, and June 15 prior to fall or winter turnout. Send a drought notification letter informing permittees of the moderate drought conditions, reduced forage production, and the concern that if moisture doesn't come in the next few months to expect changes in management.
Severe Drought	<p>If drought conditions are severe at March 15th or Aug 15th, schedule drought monitoring field visits to be conducted 2-4 weeks prior to turn out to assess field conditions. Permittees will be invited to assist in monitoring. Make conclusions and notify permittees if actions are needed.</p> <p>If field verified severe drought:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • defer grazing past active growth; or • limit utilization to 35% on key forage species on pastures meeting land health standards; or • limit utilization to 25% on low elevation adobe sites or on pastures not meeting land health standards.
Extreme Drought	<p>If field verified extreme drought, manage for minimal use, i.e.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trailing only (active movement of livestock), • permit use of pastures meeting land health standards that have been rested prior years with utilization rates not to exceed 25%.

* The Trigger Points used to initiate Drought Response Tools are Drought severity categories of Moderate, Severe, and Extreme. These categories are established by the United States Drought Monitor (<http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/>). They describe different levels of drought in terms of regional impacts to water availability and crops as follows:

- Moderate Drought: Some damage to crops, pastures; streams, reservoirs, or wells, some water shortages developing or imminent; voluntary water-use restrictions requested
- Severe Drought: soil moisture and weekly streamflows estimated in the 6-10th percentile of normal, and impacts of crop or pasture losses likely; water shortages common; water restrictions imposed
- Extreme Drought: soil moisture and weekly streamflows estimated in the 3-5th percentile of normal, and impacts of major crop/pasture losses; widespread water shortages or restrictions

Bighorn Sheep Design Features

- Prohibit changing the class of livestock from cattle to sheep in allotments with High probability levels of interaction with bighorn sheep until current science mitigates risk.
- Shorten the time period spent close to known bighorn use areas.
- When opportunities arise, consider changing class of livestock in from sheep to cattle to reduce the probability of interaction between domestic and wild sheep. The allotments would be evaluated on basis of site specific domestic/bighorn sheep information and probability levels.

Grazing Strategy for Gunnison Sage Grouse Habitat

Habitat Tiers

Tier 1 are areas with proposed critical habitat (occupied) with known leks and/or priority nesting habitat (within 4 miles of active leks) and will be managed for breeding/nesting habitat (PCE2).

Tier 2 are areas within proposed critical habitat (occupied) outside of priority nesting habitat and will be managed for brood rearing habitat (PCE-2).

Tier 3 are areas in proposed critical habitat (potential and vacant/unknown) and will be managed for summer/late-fall habitat characteristics (PCE-3).

- With GUSG seasonal habitat use in mind, control the distribution of livestock, duration of use, and the time of year that livestock graze a particular location by using grazing systems such as rest-rotation, deferred rotation, or high intensity/short duration grazing strategies. Allow for growth or re-growth in each pasture during each growing season to provide quality vegetation and vegetation height requirements during periods of sage-grouse seasonal use.
- Vegetation within GUSG habitat will be managed to move toward achieving the desired vegetation characteristics as described in the proposed critical habitat (78 FR 2546) for the Tiers described above.
- If needed, modify livestock use in pastures or allotments when wild ungulate grazing has significantly reduced vegetative cover to below PCE-2 vegetation requirements for sage grouse 2 weeks prior to spring/summer turn out.
- If wild ungulates are contributing to reduce vegetative cover to below PCE-2 vegetation requirements for sage grouse, work with CPW to assess and adjust wild ungulate grazing.
- As much as possible, use alternative pastures to avoid using sage-grouse seasonal use areas during or immediately before important use periods (breeding [15 March to 30 June], brood rearing [June through August], wintering [1 December through 15 March]). Alternatively, use a rotational grazing plan to decrease stress on sage-grouse during important use periods.
- Where possible, do not graze the same pasture at the same time of year for consecutive years. If not possible, develop smaller grazing units within large pastures using salting, supplements, water, herding, or fencing to facilitate improved grazing practices.
- Do not exceed prescribed utilization levels around riparian areas, water sources, bottoms and draws, and along benches, by diverting more utilization to slopes and ridge tops. Manage grazing in riparian or wet meadow habitat areas to maintain or move towards the desired riparian vegetation condition.
- Develop, when needed, alternative water sources to distribute livestock and improve water availability for wildlife and GUSG.
- BLM will monitor to determine actual growth of grass during spring and summer deferment to determine if wild ungulates (deer and elk) have used the area in the winter/early spring to the utilization capacity where grazing use may have to be modified for domestic livestock in the spring or following winter period.
- As necessary, periodically graze lek sites moderately to heavily, to maintain site openness that GUSG require. Note: temporary fencing, herding, or increased stocking rate could be used, but needs to be limited to specific lek site, so as to not overgraze surrounding area.
- Seek to reduce site specific impacts to nesting grouse (i.e. timing overlaps, 15 March through 30 June), if possible.
- If grass cover, height and/or vigor is lower than mid-range PCE2, then make changes to management to encourage improvement.
 - a. During drought years, provide partial to full growing season rest in pastures containing priority nesting habitat to provide for mid-range PCE2 vegetation characteristics.
 - b. Protect grass cover (PCE-2) March 15-June 1 for breeding habitat
- If monitoring data indicate forb condition is declining, defer spring grazing to move toward meeting habitat guidelines for GUSG. Lightly or moderately graze deferred areas in the fall.
- If shrub cover, height and/or vigor is lower than mid-range PCE-2, then make changes to management to encourage improvement
 - a. Reduced utilization to 20% (on average) in addition to evaluating changes to stocking rate, or season of use.

- b. If don't see improvement on PCE-2 within 3-5 years then employ longer-term adjustments to grazing, including changing grazing system, reducing stocking/season of use.
- c. Within priority nesting habitat, if vegetation does not show improvement on PCE-2 within 4-7 years of permit renewal, then temporarily remove sheep grazing from the allotment until PCE-2 is met.
- d. Once vegetation reaches mid-range PCE-2 for shrub cover, evaluate if appropriate to phase in a return to prior utilization rates, provided PCE-2 is maintained or continues improving.
- In drought situation, utilization is reduced to the next lower level for the season to provide for mid-range PCE-2 vegetation characteristics.
- Livestock grazing will be deferred for all Gunnison sage-grouse habitat improvement or restoration treatments for a minimum of two growing seasons to ensure establishment and persistence of desired vegetation, unless analysis or management objectives recommend otherwise.

The following are standard terms and conditions attached to all permits. Other terms and conditions specific to applicable allotments will also be developed. These allotment-specific terms and conditions could apply to management in riparian areas, land health conditions, livestock camps, guard dogs, bighorn sheep interaction, special status plants, sage grouse, and other.

Terms and Conditions Common to All Permits

- Grazing will be limited to 18 days or less in each pasture or use area during the growing season to prevent grazing of plant re-growth. This limitation does not apply to dormant season grazing periods, as determined by the authorized officer.
- Periodic authorization of grazing outside the permit authorization period (15 days pre and post grazing dates) specified in the grazing permit may be allowed with prior approval.
- Grazing will be deferred on new vegetation treatments and rehabilitated burned areas a minimum of 3 growing seasons, or to the extent necessary to comply with BLM Colorado Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management (BLM 1997), as determined by the authorized officer.
- Consecutive spring and fall grazing within a 1 year period of BLM pastures or use areas will not be authorized. Exceptions may be made to accommodate grazing deferments associated with fire stabilization and rehabilitation, or vegetation treatments, etc. This kind of authorization would be granted only after notification and consultation with the authorized officer.
- The grazing permittee is responsible for maintenance of Range Improvement Projects covered under a Cooperative Agreement as directed by the Agreement or as coordinated with the BLM authorized officer. The BLM authorized officer will be contacted prior to any range project maintenance activity involving soil disturbance, e.g. cleaning of ponds or reservoirs with heavy equipment, which would involve soil surface disturbance. All heavy equipment will be washed and free of debris before entering BLM lands.
- This grazing permit authorizes motorized access off existing public routes for maintenance purposes of range improvement projects and the retrieval of sick, injured and dead animals only.

- Grazing will be managed in a way that does not encourage the establishment or spread of weeds or other invasive plants and does not conflict with efforts to treat such weeds and invasive plants.
- Salt and mineral supplement sites are allowed but must be at least ¼ mile (or as far as practical) from permanent water sources and known populations or individuals of federally threatened or endangered plants. The exception to this is placing salt in the bottom of reservoirs for sealing purposes.
- The operator is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the allotment, trailing, crossing or livestock movement operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any Allotment activities and grazing activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer. Within five working days the authorized officer will inform the operator as to:
 - Whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Place;
 - The mitigation measures the operator will likely have to undertake before the identified area can be used for grazing activities again and,
- Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) the holder of this authorization must notify the authorized officer, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred object, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.
- If paleontological materials (fossils) are uncovered during Allotment, trailing, crossing or livestock movement activities, the operator is to immediately stop activities that might further disturb such materials, and contact the authorized officer. The operator and the authorized officer will consult and determine the best option for avoiding or mitigating paleontological site damage.
- Additional stipulations may be added to this permit if new cultural or paleontological sites are identified that could be affected by livestock grazing.
- Submission of an actual-use report is required within 15 days after the end of the grazing season.
- Move 95% of all livestock from one pasture to the next within 3 days of scheduled move; All livestock will be relocated within 7 days of scheduled move.
- Allotments will be cleared within 24 hours of vacating allotment to capture any strays.

Note:

The complete draft Proposed Action will be available at the public meeting, and on the NEPA web site (posted about July 25).

The web site is: http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Information/nepa/ufo.html

Scroll to number -2013-0038 EA.